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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000743

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TAGS: [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#) [RO](#) [TU](#) [AR](#) [AJ](#) [BU](#)
SUBJECT: BULGARIA AND THE BLACK SEA

REF: SECSTATE 79658

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A cautious Bulgarian delegation, led by Foreign Minister Kalvin, will attend the June 5 Black Sea Forum. The GOB's Black Sea interagency working group has not yet made a recommendation on Bulgarian participation in Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH), and the Bulgarians are looking for specifics on exactly what this participation will entail. Bulgaria is ready to share information and suggests expanding the role of the Burgas Center, which currently exchanges data between littoral interior ministries. Most importantly, they are looking for specifics on any planned U.S. or NATO role in the Black Sea. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In response to reftel demarche, referring to OBSH, Plamen Bonchev, Director of the MFA's NATO and International Security Directorate, said that "a national operation should not be the basis for regional security in the Black Sea." He said NATO has a "strategic responsibility" in the region, and Bulgaria favors expanding Operation Active Endeavor (OAE) into the Black Sea. In a bilateral meeting April 29, the MFA informed Turkey that Bulgaria did not yet have an official position on OBSH. Both sides agreed to meet again in mid-June. According to Bonchev, this meeting would be postponed if Bulgaria does not have an official position by then. He mentioned that Romania held similar talks with Turkey May 9.

¶3. (C) Bonchev raised a number of challenges to Bulgarian participation in OBSH:

- Under Bulgarian law, the exchange of classified information with Turkey would require a bilateral memorandum of understanding unless the exchange occurs within the framework of NATO. Bulgaria has offered to sign such a memorandum, but the Turks "were only interested in exchanging economic information."

- The GOB is also concerned about financial and resource challenges associated with participation in OBSH.

- The GOB has questions about the modalities of the command relationship between Turkish and Bulgarian forces.

Poloff reiterated that Bulgaria's membership in OBSH would not preclude, but facilitate, future U.S. or NATO involvement and stressed the U.S. desire to encourage Bulgaria's cooperation with Turkey in developing a practical concept of operation for an expanded OBSH.

¶4. (C) Bonchev was clear that "a NATO face" is key in the Black Sea. Recognizing that OAE is not likely to be extended into the Black Sea, Bulgaria's preferred option is "NATO engagement based on national operations linked directly to NATO." Rather than sharing information with Turkey, Bulgaria prefers to provide maritime surveillance information directly to the Allied Maritime Component Command (CCMAR) in Naples through NATO channels. The information could then be combined with OAE to provide an integrated picture of the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

¶5. (C) DCM met with Deputy Defense Minister Sonya Yankulova and Yordan Bozhilov, Director of the MOD's International Cooperation Directorate, May 23 to discuss the reftel points at the MOD. Yankulova echoed the MFA's concerns and asked for more information on how the U.S. envisions its role in the Black Sea and any possible U.S./NATO involvement in OBSH. She said that "Bulgaria is ready to share information with CCMAR," and offered to explore ways to expand the role of the Burgas Center, a multi-national information fusion center for littoral ministries of interior. According to Bozhilov, Russia is ready to send officers to participate in OBSH's command structure. He wondered how Bulgaria would share information with a command that includes non-NATO officers.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. The GOB is approaching the idea of OBSH participation in a cautious but constructive manner despite concerns of Turkish domination. They appear ready to share information on national Black Sea activities but would prefer a more collective information conduit to NATO. The Bulgarians are eager to use the June 5 Black Sea Forum as an opportunity to discuss many of their questions and concerns.
END COMMENT.
Beyrle